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IN AMERICA'S GREATEST PRISON.

BY THOMAS SPEED MOSBY, PARDON ATTORNEY TO THE GOVERNOR
OF MISSOURI.

THE Missouri State Prison is the largest penitentiary in the United States. Here are confined more convicts than will be found in any other American State Prison. Those States which have a criminal population in any wise approaching that of Missouri have provided two or more prisons for their keeping, whereas Missouri confines all her criminals in the penal institution at Jefferson City.

From eight hundred to one thousand convicts are received at this institution every year, and at no time during the past twelve years has the population of this prison been less than two thousand. This city of crime, consisting of more than two thousand felons, convicted of eighty-five different felonies, presents to the criminologist a field most interesting because of its size, and most instructive because of its representative character.

Less than half the number received at this institution are native-born Missourians. Of the 1,794 convicts received during a recent two-year period, but 819 were born in Missouri. The remaining 975 came from every State in the Union excepting Idaho, Montana, Nevada and New Hampshire. Every other one of the remaining States was represented, as was also the Indian Territory and the District of Columbia, and thirteen foreign countries besides. Of this number, but 80 were females, and only 27 of the 80 were white women. Of the males, 523, or nearly one-third, were negroes.

The most striking feature of this immense criminal population is the exceedingly large proportion of young men, 785 of the number ranging from sixteen to twenty-five years of age. The age of greatest criminality is shown to be the period between the

ages of twenty and twenty-five years, inclusive; the second greatest period of criminality is between the ages of twenty-five and thirty; and the third is between the ages of sixteen and twenty years. The fourth period is from thirty to thirty-five, and from the age of thirty-five onward the tendency to crime seems to decrease with the increase of age.

Of the 1,794 convicts, 627, or more than one-third, were of the ages of twenty to twenty-five years, both inclusive. Of this number, 96 were twenty years of age; 98 were twenty-one; 104 were twenty-two; 132 were twenty-three; 101 were twenty-four; and 96 were twenty-five. It thus appears that the age of greatest criminality in the period of greatest criminality is twenty-three. Of this younger and most numerous class of criminals, 404 of the 627 (or nearly two-thirds) had committed crimes of violence, such as homicides, assaults with intent to kill, burglaries, etc., the remaining 223 having committed crimes such as larceny, forgery, and other crimes not involving the use of physical violence. It is thus shown that, in the period of greatest criminal activity, crimes of the daring and adventurous sort are most frequent. Singularly enough, it appears that the crimes involving the sexual passions are proportionately small among this class of criminals. Out of a total of 135 crimes of this character, only 30 were committed by persons within the age of greatest criminality. Thus, although committing more than one-third of the total number of crimes within the given period, the persons within this class committed less than one-fourth of the sexual crimes.

Comparatively few of the 1,794 convicts had learned any trade or profession, 1,198 giving their occupation as that of day laborers, and 107 more giving their occupation as that of shoemaking; but, among the shoemakers, there was a great proportion of ex-convicts, who had learned shoemaking in the prison shoe-factories, but who in the beginning had no occupation. The inference to be drawn is that the trades and professions usually act as deterrents against crime. Of the trades and professions, generally, no one class seemed to be more criminal than another, the remaining 489 convicts being divided among 66 trades and professions.

Intemperate habits of life were not so much in evidence as might have been expected, 852 (or nearly one-half) having led

temperate lives. Nor was there so great a lack of religion as might have been imagined. Of the whole number, there were 1,267, or more than two-thirds, who were professors of some form of religious belief. The respective denominations to which the 1,267 convicts belonged appear below:

Baptist	396
Methodist	335
Catholic	312
Christian	120
Presbyterian	48
Lutheran	29
Episcopal	16
Hebrew	6
Dunkard	5

The percentage of illiteracy among the convicts was 26.5, which is four times as great as the average percentage of illiteracy among the non-criminal classes in Missouri. Those professing a belief in some form of religion constituted about 71 per cent. of the whole number. Those having some degree of education aggregated 73.5 per cent. The conclusion is obvious that, to a slight extent at least, religion is of more avail in preventing crime than is education; or, otherwise stated, that illiteracy is less dangerous to society than irreligion. To be sure, neither education nor religion of a very pure or advanced type is found among the majority of felons, but these statistics tend at least to illustrate the respective moral tendencies of the illiterate and the irreligious, the irreligious apparently lapsing most frequently into the ways of vice and crime. It is obviously true, also, although not susceptible of accurate statistical demonstration, that there is a higher degree of education among the educated criminals than there is of religion among religious criminals; for mere intellectual strength, while it may aid criminals in escaping detection and avoiding punishment, does not necessarily cause men to adhere to the paths of moral rectitude, whereas religion, if its precepts be precisely obeyed, is absolutely incompatible with any criminal tendency whatsoever.

The accepted theory that marriage tends to operate against the commission of crime is amply sustained by the Missouri statistics, less than one-third of the number mentioned being married persons; or, otherwise expressed, it appears that, where crime is committed by one married person, crimes are committed by two unmarried persons.

Among the number which constituted the subject of the present inquiry, 1,689 were native-born Americans, while the remaining 105 came from Mexico, Australia, Canada, Austria, Denmark, England, Germany, France, Ireland, Italy, Scotland, Russia and Switzerland; Germany leading with 37, Canada coming next with 16, England following with 10, and Ireland being fourth with 8. Scotland and Russia each had 7, Austria 6, France 4, Italy and Denmark 3 each, Mexico 2, and Australia and Switzerland 1 each.

The foreign-born population of the State was 216,379, and the native-born population 2,890,286. It thus appears that of the foreign-born population .0049 per cent. are convicts, while the felons of the native-born population number .0058 per cent. In other words, 49 in every ten thousand foreigners committed felonies while crimes of the same class were committed by 58 in every ten thousand of the native-born population. The foreign-born population of the State aggregates about seven per cent. of the population, while the percentage of foreign-born convicts received during the two-year period was 5.9 per cent. of the whole number of convicts received during that period. If there is a greater percentage of criminality among the foreign-born people of this country than is found among the native American population, the fact is not shown by these statistics.

The current theory that criminality is greatest in the larger centres of population is borne out by the Missouri statistics. Of the 1,794 convicts under investigation, one-third came from cities containing one-fourth of the population of the State.

Of the 1,794, 1,550 were in prison for the first term; 191 for the second term, 41 for the third term, 9 for the fourth term, 2 for the fifth term and 1 for the sixth term. Thus, 86 per cent. were first-termers; that is to say, 86 men in every hundred were never in the penitentiary before. Of the remaining 14 per cent. who were old offenders, 191, or over 10 per cent. of the whole number, were in the penitentiary for the second time, while less than one-fifth of the 14 per cent. were in for the third time. It may therefore be concluded that a large proportion of those who undergo a sentence in the penitentiary are deterred from again committing crime, and are converted again to law and order.

THOMAS SPEED MOSBY.